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Teacher Education Policy Research in China: A Decade Review and Reflection

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Abstract

Nowadays, teacher education in China is at the key period of transition, and has stepped into a process of deepening reform. Thus, teacher education policy has also become a hot topic in education research. Faced with multiple difficulties and dilemmas in the process of teacher education reform, seeking the solution path and guarantee mechanism from the perspective of policy has been the important and difficult topic. Through combing relevant research achievements in teacher education policies, the focus is put on the interest groups and value pursuit of policies for free normal students, teacher qualification certificate, teachers training and teacher mobility. This article aims to grasp the research skeleton and current trends in the field of teacher education policy research, reflect on the problems appeared, and raise more researchers' attentions and reflections on teacher education policy.

Key words: Teacher education policy; Free normal students; Teachers training; Teacher qualification certificate; Teacher mobility

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher education is a guarantee of teacher resources and education equality. With the publishing of *National medium and long-term plan for education reform and development*, teacher education has stepped into a new historical period. Teacher education system has gradually developed into a more open, improved and creative one. A specific teacher education system with evident Chinese characteristics has been gradually constructed. Governments have realized the importance of teacher education including the improvement of education quality, and the future development of China. In return, China has proposed and passed several policies and laws to offer the abundant guarantee for the further development of teacher education. As the top-level design, teacher education policies have presented their critical functions not only in the macroscopic level of reform (i.e. teacher education school management mechanism, financial mechanism), but also microcosmic level of reform (i.e. teacher education models, teacher education curriculum). In conclusion, to explore the current research of teacher education policy can not only provide a chance to present the development of teacher education in China, but also to examine policy researchers' abilities of responding to the new challenges timely and provide correct and practical advices. Through the analysis of the articles published in recent ten years, the research on free normal students, teachers training, teacher qualification certificate and teacher mobility has been the popular topics.

1. SEEKING EQUALITY OF POLICY ON FREE NORMAL STUDENTS POLICY

Since 2007, free normal students policy has been the focus of researchers, especially when the first generation of free normal students graduated and stepped into their teaching careers. During this process, they have encountered

several challenges such as in-service career development. Many researchers reviewed the free normal student policy. In history, free normal education dates back into 1902 in Qing Dynasty, so the free normal student policy issued in 2007 is merely “an era of teacher education going back to be free”. While in the era of the Republic of China (1912-1949), free normal education policy is basically inherited, but the policy is not steady, often swung from free to charging. Secondly, many researchers analyzed the necessity of the policy implementation. Wanqin Li (2007) considered free normal students policy as an important strategy to ensure education equality and the balanced development of education. While Shi and Liu (2008) refers free normal education as an important system and country design of strengthening the education quality. Gao (2009) disserts the policy as a design combing the future teacher training and rural teacher team refreshment and construction, as well as a comprehensive project improving the training over teacher morality, teacher professional quality, normal students’ practical teaching skills. While free normal students have also been the focus of researchers, mostly includes the admission policy, training policy, employment policy and in-service development policy. Deng (2012) holds to the point that education internship is a necessity path of improving their sense of profession identity, so the education internship curriculum and training plan should be innovated. Lu (2010) proposed that the teacher morality education, thanksgiving education, honesty education should be implemented, so that free normal students could plan their career development in advance, then willingly work , stay in rural schools rather than schools in cities. Tan (2014) analyzed the problems and dilemmas in free normal students’ curriculum in seeking Master of Education degree and the innovation of activity curriculum, subject curriculum. Besides, the implementation effect is also a focus of researchers. Many researchers begin with the proposal, implementation, and evaluation of a policy. Liu and Yang (2013) used “process model” to analyze the process residual for policy implementation, in a perspective of predictable evaluation. Fang, Yao, and Zhou (2012) investigated free normal students in six colleges and universities affiliated to the Ministry of Education, and analyzed the impacts and problems in policy implementation, so the problems, such as low sense of profession identity, incorrect profession position, low policy cognition have been revealed. Liu (2012), from the perspective of public policy, proposed that policy subjects are more focused on the operation of policies, while the propaganda of policies is not enough, the implementation method is mostly administrative, and the policy experiment in advance is still vacant. At the same time, how to carry out the policy in local normal colleges and universities has become another focus for researchers. Researchers proposed that based on the

previous experience gained during the previous policy implementation in six colleges and universities affiliated to the Ministry of Education, the policy application can be expanded into a wider area, such as free normal students policy in local normal colleges and universities, so as to bring more elite students into the career of teachers. For now, Jilin, Guangxi provinces have implemented free normal students policy in local normal colleges.

In conclusion, the research of free normal students policy can be divided into two parts: (a) Appearance Period: from 2007 to 2010, research mainly appeared with the theme of necessity and prospects for free normal students policy, often from the perspective of the country and society; (b) Prosperous Period: from 2011 till now, the research perspective of free normal students changed from the macro ones such as country, society into micro ones such as free normal students themselves. Many researchers used the methods of questionnaires, field talk, analyzed their studying motive, sense of profession identity, sense of policy identity, teaching ability, learning strategies, so as to reveal the reality and problems of free normal students. Their problems are mainly presented as low sense of policy identity, inadequate studying motive, developing teaching abilities etc.

As analyzed above, research of free normal student policy has gone through a path from focusing on macro policy proposers to micro policy implementers. To look through relevant research, the value pursuits of all kinds of education policies are mutual: education equality. That is to say, how to make effect of free normal students policy in practice to ensure education equality? But what is the actual impact of free normal student policy? Whether local normal colleges and universities should be included in the implementation area? Is free normal students policy a real enhancement in education equality? To answer these questions, the longitudinal research should be expanded to those free normal students who have stepped into work careers, to improve the policy. As for the problems appeared during the policy implementation in six colleges and universities affiliated with the Ministry of Education, will the problems be mutual during the further implementation of the policy into local normal universities? How to avoid those problems is in need of further research.

2. TEACHER QUALIFICATION CERTIFICATE POLICY “NON-LIFELONG” AND “LAYER-DIVIDED”

Teacher qualification certificate is a profession admission certificate and a necessary condition for teachers to step into their work careers. Researchers mainly based on the problems such as lifelong certification, subject category division, applying across the country, to design a reform project of recertifying during certain intervals, category-divided certifying, and effective in certain areas.

First, teacher qualification certificate nowadays has faced the challenges of becoming merely an admission card into teacher career, and no further encouragement to the professional development of in-service teachers. Some researchers have already analyzed the system of teacher qualification certificate policy in China, digested successful experience from America, Japan, France, and proposed that teacher qualification certificate system should change its ways of certifying. Some suggested to change into being certified at certain intervals which can be based on the teacher professional development. Some other researchers proposed to certify according to the needs of teacher team management. The way of certifying at certain intervals can be divided into “gradual sparse certifying” (based on teacher profession development process) and “balanced certifying” (the certifying term is concrete and easy to operate). After a certain times of certifying, the lifelong certification can be issued. The vital issue in certifying at intervals is the standard and qualification or criteria. The certifying standard should be strict. G. Q. Li and W. Li (2006) proposed to refer to other profession certification standards (such as Accounting Professional Certificate), and consider teacher training as one of the elements while combining standardized exams, in-service teacher training credits, profession archives to ensure certifying equality is also proposed. Researchers fully digested the beneficial practice plans and results, but the previous research, a delicate design over supervision mechanism is vacant.

Secondly, G. Q. Li and W. Li (2006) suggest it necessary to reform the teacher qualification certificate, and divide the certification into different levels. One is on the basis of teacher professional development career, the division may be: novice teacher qualification certificate, intermediate teacher qualification certificate, sophisticated teacher qualification certificate, lifelong teacher qualification certificate. But education internship, as a career starting point of really deepening into campus and students, as a fresh start for normal students to be in position of teachers, should be considered a start of teacher profession development career, so “internship teacher qualification certificate” should be listed into the teacher certification levels. In addition, the communication and specialty of each level should be emphasized. The other is to divide teacher based on applying areas, such as National Teacher Qualification Certificate and Local Teacher Qualification Certificate. Of course, these two levels can be implemented as a whole. Teacher qualification certificate for now is only restricted inside the school area, however, out-of-school education institutions are excluded. Some researchers proposed to perfect teacher qualification categories, and place education institution teachers into managing area, this strategy would be beneficial for the canonicalization of out-of-school education institutions. At the same time,

for those developing areas lacking teachers of a certain subject, temporary teacher qualification adjustment mechanism can be implemented. For example, if a teacher has the ability of teaching Math in primary schools, but the teacher certification he has already gained is teaching Math in secondary school level, then he can also teach in primary schools to meet the urgent needs. But from the writer’s view, to ensure education quality, a strict accommodation procedure and adequate benefit compensation must be designed. In addition, through research of American Selective Teacher Certification, Japanese Teacher Certification, researchers checked the problems of teacher certificate; Zhou (2003) introduced the reality problems of “Low Standards, High Obstacles” and proposed reform strategies of improving teacher certification standards, clarifying certification requirements. American Selective Teacher Certification, as a non-traditional teacher certification acquisition way, researchers give a detailed introduction to its implementation, evaluation, and summarized the revelation over teacher qualification certificate in China.

However, looking through the research of foreign education, descriptive essays are plenty, but usually the essays are merely describing without comments. Some research of referring to foreign education experience is only a mechanical grafting with the reality in China. Nowadays, non-lifelong certifying strategy has been carried out in some provinces, but research of these policy implementation and evaluation is still vacant. What is the implementing effect of the modified policy? What is the effect of modified policy implementation on teachers? Is there deviation of policy aim in the process of policy implementation? What might be the obstacles when the policy implementation is expanded across China? How to adjust the policy so as to avoid these predictable problems? In the process of policy implementation, how to coordinate the specialty of different places? These questions require policy researchers to change the descriptive research into empirical research and to propose advices on the perfection of teacher qualification certificate implementation.

3. IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING BASED ON THE NATIONAL TRAINING PLAN

As an important impulse on improving education quality and enhancing teacher team construction, the policy tendency and reform path of teacher policy become the important policy project and focus of teacher education. Nowadays, teacher training innovation has gained wide attention. The research topic team of East China Normal University (2003) suggests that teacher education institutions certifying and evaluation system should be implemented, so as to encourage teacher training from

independent normal education system to flexible and open teacher education system. Bo (2005) suggests that teacher education credits should be implemented, coordinate the credits setting, put in-service primary and secondary teachers training into teacher certificate standards, so that the efficiency and practicability of teacher training can be ensured. Secondly, "National Training Plan" is a policy discourse, sponsored by Chinese central government to guarantee the training for teachers in primary and secondary schools. So the value, implementation and evaluation of "National Training Plan" are the focus of teacher training policy research. Zhu (2010) suggested that the value of "National Training Plan" should be presented in the country's public value (publicity and authority), social value (the internal and external influence in education), and teachers professional development value (the overall professional improvement). Researchers like Zhang, Wang, and Hong (2013) believe the value pursuit of "Happy Life" in the "National Training Plan" is based on teachers' internal motive and external support. They believe it important to awaken the life instinct inside teachers, encourage them to possess the abilities of embracing love, and influence the internal development of teachers. The implementation of "National Training Plan" is closely connected with the trainers and institutions providing relevant training for teachers. Principal experts in the "National Training Plan" act as the designers, managers, researchers and constructors of training resources and projects, so they play vital roles in the actual implementation of the plan. In consequence, Zhang, Wang, and Hong (2013) believe it necessary to make teachers realize the multiple roles they should play in their training: "learner", "teacher" and "individual". In addition, researchers suggest the training tendency of "condition" more important than "methods", "research" more important than "experience", "key parts" more important than "the whole". At the same time, some researchers focused on rural kindergarten teachers, which are the fragile chain in the "National Training Plan". Master-hand teachers discussion, outstanding class forum, community theme seminar and researching while training method has been estimated as an appropriate model. As to the evaluation of "National Training Plan", an implementation report should be proposed to the education departments. Zhu and Liu (2004) suggested that governments can adopt the way of purchasing service, to entrust professional institutions with the work of report evaluation. Besides, some researchers use the method of system analysis, and found out that the function of teacher professional development guarantee system is not fully exploited. In Singapore, teacher professional development guarantee system not only applies to ordinary teachers, but also on administrative personnel who work in education departments and schools. The officials in education departments can only be selected from schools.

This policy in Singapore has a sparkling influence on the atmosphere of severe administration in China.

In the previous teacher training policy research, the perspective is mostly from country, society or schools. In the future, researchers might change the research perspective into trainees, or even expanded to students, and research methods may adopt multiple kinds: questionnaires, field talk, experiment etc.. But how to ensure teachers' rights of training? How to specify teacher training of all school levels? How to coordinate teacher training policies across urban and rural areas? How to evaluate the quality and effect of training according to administrative standards? When "National Training Plan" ends, how to construct another model training project? These questions might be the new conditions and challenges in teacher training faces, and worth exploring.

4. TEACHER MOBILITY POLICY RESEARCH ENHANCING EDUCATION COORDINATION DEVELOPMENT

To coordinate the education resource equipment in rural and urban areas during compulsory education period, teacher mobility is a hot topic and a problem worth exploring. After teacher mobility policy is implemented, the focus of policy research should be changed from the theoretical level to practical level. Research should not only be done from the perspective of teachers, but also from students for longitudinal track research, so as to evaluate the real impact of the policy, to see whether it is true to improve education quality and enhance the education resource coordination. At first, Wu (2008) analyzed the necessity of teacher mobility, mainly includes macro layer from country, society requirements and micro layer of teacher development needs. Teacher mobility is beneficial to teacher professional development and the improvement of education quality in urban and rural schools. While the obstacles against teacher mobility are also an important focus of teacher mobility, such as the incomplete policy implementation, substitute implementation (local policies implementation substitute of national ones), policy interest conflict between relevant departments, the inappropriate supervisory of education departments etc..

The appropriate coordination of kindergarten teacher resources is the insurance for the establishment of qualified preschool education. According to this, personnel agency strategy, special allowance can be seen as effective ways to enhance the policy implementation. Ma and Jing (2009) have analyzed teacher mobility strategies, such as creating policy environment for teacher mobility, enhancing income equality, improving the work and living conditions of rural teachers, sharing high-quality teacher resources inside the administrative district, and establishing teacher mobility profit reimbursement mechanism, which includes financial and spiritual

reimbursement. In addition, some researchers proposed that the implementation of teacher mobility should place the actual guarantee of teacher position and treatment as the premise. A scientific and reasonable system contents and justice operational procedure must be proposed. The implementation must be based on the local reality and the relevant policies, laws as guarantee mechanisms. Teacher mobility in Japan dates back in late 1940s, and grew mature in 1960s, the teacher mobility system is already quite sophisticated in guarantee system, administrative support etc.. The research on teacher mobility in Japan is mainly expanded the following aspects: the theme of teacher mobility, the operation process, the guarantee mechanism etc.. Researchers mainly digested the successful experience of teacher mobility from Japan, but there is still a wide gap between the education reality of Japan and China, How to perfect policies and laws in order to construct interest compensation mechanism which for local development, should become the focus of further research. Otherwise, the school managers, headmasters and other administrative staff should also be included in teacher mobility. This policy certainly proposed higher requirements for the management and teaching abilities of headmasters. In consequence, the equipped training course, management strategies, mobility mechanism construction should be deeply explored from the perspectives of both teaching requirements and management needs.

In conclusion, education quality is mainly determined by the quality of teachers. Teacher education policy is the guide and pilot of ensuring high quality teachers. The proposal, implementation and evaluation of teacher education policies, determine the developing direction and quality of teacher education in China. To perform the directing, coordinating, controlling function of teacher education policies, scientific research from multiple perspectives, wider areas should be carried out to analyze the achievements, problems and shortcomings of teacher education policies. At the same time, in the process of teacher education policy research, education researchers should place their roles correctly, divide themselves from the policy proposers and teacher team, to ensure theory research not merely a policy annotation or experience summary, and to ensure teacher education policy step into deeper reform and development scientifically.

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